

VIETNAM AFFAIRS STAFF
Approved For Release 2001/08/07 : CIA-RDP72-00337R0060021-7

DATE: 20Feb70

TO: Mr. Maury

FROM: [REDACTED]

SUBJECT:

REMARKS:

Attached per your request are a series of comments on Kaiser's Phoenix article that appeared in the 17 February Washington Post. You can use this piece as a background talking paper in your dealings with your clients on the Hill.

[REDACTED]
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment

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Vietnam

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19 February 1970

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Comments on Washington Post Article of 17 February 1970,
by Robert G. Kaiser, Jr. on "Phoenix Project"

1. While the Kaiser article does contain some inaccuracies, the major criticism is its imbalance in highlighting some of the acknowledged or potential abuses, shortcomings or aberrations which are probably inevitable in any program conducted in a war situation, while failing to set forth the real purposes and intent of the program. He introduces bias into the article by giving extensive coverage to critics of the program, who may or may not be qualified observers while devoting minimum space to those who acknowledge the necessity of the program and its successes. He distorts the purposes of the program by emphasizing charges that it is an assassination program subject to misuse, although later he acknowledges that he was unable to uncover evidence to support these charges. He fails to mention the numerous captured documents which testify to the concern of the enemy over the inroads being made by the Phung Hoang program into its subversive structure.

2. The following comments are keyed to specific statements in the article which are guided and which can be located by the number of the line which appears in connection with each comment:

- 1 - "The program to neutralize the Viet Cong infrastructure in South Vietnam is called Phoenix." Comment: The program to neutralize the Viet Cong infrastructure (VCI) is called Phung Hoang. The Phoenix program is the American advisory effort to the Phung Hoang program.
- 9 - "Phoenix as an instrument of mass political murder." Comment: The Phung Hoang program is a wartime emergency measure aimed at protecting the Vietnamese people from the insidious actions -- political, military, economic, and subversive -- of the illegal Communist clandestine organization that lies submerged within the population. The program is oriented toward the capture and rehabilitation of the enemy leadership.

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- 25 - "They don't understand at home what's going on out here. " Comment: It is very difficult even for Americans who live in the District and Province towns of Vietnam to comprehend the state of terror in which rural South Vietnamese continually live because they do not speak the language and because the terror is not directed at them. Americans assigned to the Provinces have a great deal of difficulty convincing many Americans assigned in Saigon of the true nature and extent of the terrorism, and it is even more difficult to explain to people who have never been to Vietnam. Unless one has been personally threatened or has lost a member of his family to terrorists, it is extremely unlikely that he could genuinely understand terrorism as it really exists in Vietnam.
- 38 - "Because Phoenix is an offspring of the CIA." Comment: Phoenix is an operational concept to provide a balanced police program in a counter insurgency situation which CIA was requested to develop by the Executive Branch of the government.
- 46 - "Phoenix's secrets are not well kept in Vietnam. " Comment: Phoenix is not a classified program; neither is Phung Hoang.
- 68 - "A small fraction, probably one-tenth to one-fifth of the Viet Cong infrastructure neutralized are captured or killed on purpose. " Comment: A similar fraction of the Viet Cong infrastructure are neutralized as a result of long range investigations which lead to their apprehension. Many more are neutralized as a result of quick-reaction operations on the basis of spot information indicating that known members of the infrastructure will be at a given point at a given time. Some are captured, induced to

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- 82 - "The most important point about Phoenix said one official who had access to all the program's statistics 'is that it isn't working.'" Comment: As indicated above, a much better source -- captured enemy documents -- say quite the contrary since the Viet Cong regard Phung Hoang as successful. The presence of 1400 VCI refugees in Ba Thu, Cambodia further attests to the effectiveness of the pressure on the VCI brought about by Phung Hoang.
- 92 - "Confidential studies by Deputy Under Secretary of the Army Siena indicate Phoenix has failed to neutralize a significant number of important Viet Cong officials." Comment: It is true that most neutralizations have been from the lower ranks of the Communist apparatus, although hundreds of VCI at the district level and above have been neutralized. There are two reasons for this -- there are more of them and they are more accessible. The more important cadre seldom, if ever, venture out of their clandestine base areas in South Vietnam and Cambodia. The percentage of higher-level neutralizations is improving, however. The importance of the lower-level cadre should not be discounted, since without their presence in the villages and hamlets, the Communists are unable to carry out their programs among the people. Discounting their importance reveals a gross lack of understanding of the nature of the war.
- 106 - "A common description of Phoenix one hears from officials in Vietnam is of a program without substance." Comment: The Phung Hoang program is a specialized effort to focus all forces, military and civilian, on the VCI target in the absence of an effective police force. It is primarily a coordinating function, aimed at collecting information on the VCI and to plan operations against it. It is not designed to have its own forces or to conduct its own operations. It is a roof project attempting to coordinate the intelligence and operational efforts of all other forces on a specific target, the VCI.

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- 130 - "Phoenix operations by Provincial Reconnaissance Units have involved assassinations." Comment: Provincial Reconnaissance Units (PRU) are involved in Phung Hoang operations but they do not assassinate. VCI know they are illegal and they are well protected by armed guerrilla forces. They are given a chance to surrender when surrounded, and the premium on captures is well established. Killing is a last resort, not through assassination, but usually as a result of resistance to arrest or capture, or as a consequence of fighting between allied forces attempting capture and the enemy forces who provide the security escort for VCI cadres.
- 143 - "PRU are now under local Vietnamese control, and have lost much of their ferocious reputation. 'They've lost 50 percent of their effectiveness.'" Comment: PRU statistics in the Phung Hoang program are significantly less than a year ago for several reasons: (1) There are not as many VCI to be found as formerly; many have rallied, been captured or killed, or have fled to Cambodia as the government extended its writ into the countryside. (2) Because of the success of pacification and military operations, there are now many more Phung Hoang forces, including police, in the field. Furthermore, the added effectiveness contributed by American advisors has been minor. The PRU have always operated with the approval of the Province or District chief, and primarily on their own. Local apathy does occur on occasion, and for varied reasons.
- 170 - "Phoenix is potentially dangerous, for it could be used against political opponents of the regime whether they were Viet Cong or not." Comment: This is a danger that is present in all South Vietnamese programs, but as Kaiser states, "there is no evidence that this has happened yet" in the Phung Hoang program. The police are the accepted means for dealing with civilians who are outside the law. All operations are approved in

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advance and are subject to review. The participation of numerous GVN agencies actually inhibits misuse of the program and the presence of US advisors provides an added safeguard.

- 178 - "Phoenix contributes substantially to corruption." Comment: There is no evidence that Phung Hoang contributes to corruption any more than any police program. Corruption is deeply imbedded in the South Vietnamese social system, and some abuses undoubtedly exist in this program. But Phung Hoang did not create the opportunity for corruption, since the attack on the VCI has been going on since 1954, and with it, presumably, some corruption.
- 185 - "Phoenix is helping the Viet Cong more than hurting it. By throwing people in prison who are often only low-level operatives--the government is alienating a large slice of the population." Comment: There is no doubt that some alienation takes place when a member of the family is arrested. However, leniency and the opportunities for reconciliation which are provided in the Phung Hoang program minimize this. We believe far more are alienated by the terrorism, intimidation, kidnapping, forced labor, and high taxes imposed by the Viet Cong. These low-level operatives must be jailed to prove to them and others who would be similarly persuaded that if they support an illegal insurgency they will be punished.
- 202 - "All officials interviewed agreed that the Phoenix program had failed to hurt the VC so far." Comment: Knowledgeable officials recognize that there are problem areas and that the program has not destroyed the infrastructure. However, the intelligence community believes the program has seriously disrupted the enemy's apparatus, lowered its quality and effectiveness, and made a significant contribution to the allied war effort.
- 213 - "Phoenix was adopted by the GVN at American urging in December 1967." Comment: Although the Phoenix program had its beginning in 1967, it was not until the Presidential Decree of July 1968 that the program was officially sanctioned by the GVN and a countrywide effort (Phung Hoang) was authorized to collect information on the VCI and to plan and launch operations targetted specifically against it.
- 230 - "Americans play no direct role in Phoenix operations." Comment: American military forces sometimes participate in Phung Hoang-initiated activities. When American troops are used to cordon and seal villages containing VCI, they are being used in Phung Hoang operations.

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- 242 - "Special Branch Police are financed by CIA and Provincial Reconnaissance Units are supposed to conduct operations to arrest these wanted persons." Comment: The Special Police are not paid by the CIA. Certain intelligence-producing operations are supported. The primary force used to arrest members of the VCI is the National Police Field Force, not the PRU. The regular, regional and popular forces, as well as the PRU, also conduct anti-VC operations.
- 250 - "Arrested individuals are interrogated. When there is some evidence of a Viet Cong connection, they are brought to trial." Comment: The implication here is that masses of people are arrested, all are interrogated and those on whom some evidence is developed are tried. The fact is that an arrest is made only when there is some evidence of collaboration with the enemy.
- 267 - "The main problem is that the Vietnamese don't seem interested in really prosecuting the program." Comment: Although there are still instances of obstructionism and lack of cooperation by local officials, there has been an overall and continuing improvement in the program's effectiveness. The increasing neutralizations of the last six months of 1969 attest to the program's growing effectiveness, and pressure from above has forced increasing cooperation among the various GVN security agencies.
- 273 - "They don't want to be caught trying to get the VCI if they think maybe next year the VCI will be in control." Comment: The impact of the negotiations and the US withdrawal program probably have caused some local officials to "sit on their hands." However, this attitude is the exception and not the rule. The number of South Vietnamese casualties each week attests to the willingness of the broad majority to bear arms for the government. The willingness of over three million civilians to commit themselves to the government under the People's Self-Defense Force program further attests to this.
- 278 - "Some local officials have made private accommodations with the Viet Cong." Comment: This is true, but again is the exception rather than the rule. Very few are willing to endanger their jobs and careers by restricting their anti-Viet Cong activities. The government has become less tolerant of ineffective officials, as attested by the large numbers of province and district chiefs replaced in the past year. The establishment of goals has also made it difficult for the local official to display apathy toward the Viet Cong.

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- 285 - "Only in the last few months has the central government put strong emphasis on Phoenix." Comment: President Thieu has given the program a high priority since the Presidential Decree of July 1968. Prime Minister Khiem, in his capacity as Interior Minister, has taken a personal interest in the program since its official inception. The current Director General of National Police is reportedly being relieved because he has not pushed Phoenix as hard as the Prime Minister would like.
- 293 - "Phoenix offices simply do not work. Many keep no records. Others mount no operations." Comment: Again, these are exceptions. The success of the Phung Hoang program is generally consistent throughout the country with the minor exception of some Montagnard districts where there are few VCI. Reporting requirements are very strict and all districts have recorded operations.
- 296 - "Phoenix is often run by poor-quality personnel, chosen for their jobs by local officials who don't want to waste their good people on the program." Comment: The program has suffered to some extent from the limited professional capability and lack of training and experience. The bulk of the best South Vietnamese are in ARVN main-line units and are not available. The requirements of the police have long been subordinated to the Army. Nevertheless, Saigon has put pressure on the province officials to assign the best available people to the program. The progress made in the program since July 1968 has been impressive and encouraging, and attests to the improving personnel situation.
- 302 - "Most district offices are run by junior army officers." Comment: The District Chief is responsible for the Phung Hoang program and his table of organization rank is Major. Although many are Captains, they are all ARVN veterans and are also veterans of a lifetime of war in which the delicate balance of pro-and anti-Viet Cong sentiments is a matter of daily concern. Reacting to spot information that the local Viet Cong tax collector is stopping traffic three miles up the road does not represent a "sophisticated political problem." It is a basic police criminal apprehension problem which requires tactical know-how.
- 322 - "Officials often count every man arrested, even if he is released immediately for lack of evidence." Comment: Phung Hoang statistics are based on the name or position of the individual neutralized. There is a detailed procedure for confirming each case which is specifically designed to prevent padding.

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147 - "'We've done all we can,' one (American) official said. 'If they want to get the VCI, they can do it. We can't do anything more.'"
Comment: Police investigative work is highly skilled and inconsistent with the military approach which has dominated U.S. training efforts to date. The South Vietnamese need help on such things as investigative techniques and records management. American advisory personnel can assist in overcoming some of the weaknesses in the fields of identification, classification, judicial processing, detention, and prisoner accountability.

CONCLUSION:

The Vietnamese war is a joint military/civil conflict in which Viet Cong civilians, operating covertly, force other Vietnamese, through terrorism and intimidation, to cooperate. The Phung Hoang program is an effort through legal means to stop this covert civilian subversion. The Kaiser article makes wide use of terms which are repugnant to Americans and attempts to make points by the use of half-quotations taken out of context. It fails to take account of the unique setting within which the war is being fought -- namely, an insurgency in which the enemy is able to switch back and forth from military to political tactics at will.

Attachment

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A 10 Tuesday, Feb. 17, 1970 THE WASHINGTON POST

U.S. Aides in Vietnam Scorn Phoenix Project

By Robert G. Kaiser Jr.

Washington Post Foreign Service

1 SAIGON, Feb. 16—The program to neutralize the Vietcong infrastructure in South Vietnam is called Phoenix, and it is a bird of several feathers.

10 Some war critics in the United States have attacked Phoenix as an instrument of mass political murder. Such sinister descriptions are not heard in Vietnam, where Phoenix has the reputation of a poorly plotted farce, sometimes with tragic over-

20 The contradiction between Phoenix's lurid reputation as a sort of Vietnamese Murder, Inc., and the scorn with which it is widely regarded here typifies one of the most popular grievances of American officials in Vietnam: "They don't understand at home what's going on out here."

30 The gulf between home-front and battlefield is likely to appear Tuesday in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing room, when American pacification officials are expected to be questioned closely about the Phoenix program.

40 Because Phoenix is an offspring of the CIA and because its operations have always been obscured by the cloak of official secrecy, the Foreign Relations Committee may discuss the program in a closed session. But Phoenix's secrets are not well kept in Vietnam.

50 The South Vietnamese run- ing American statistics on Phoenix results (which are radically more conservative

tation apparently stems from its clandestine nature, its connections with some deliberate assassinations, and accusations made by several public figures and army veterans about its activities.

An Idea of the CIA

Phoenix was the idea of the CIA, and until last July it was run by the agency. Phoenix operations conducted by Provincial Reconnaissance Units have involved assassinations. These units, another CIA organization composed of Vietnamese troops and U.S. advisers, were organized primarily as a counter-terror group to operate behind enemy lines. Assassination of Vietcong officials was one of their assignments.

But the units are now under local Vietnamese control, and have lost much of their ferocious reputation. "They've lost 50 per cent of their effectiveness," according to one U.S. official.

150 "There's some killing, but this is a war. There are no organized bump-off squads," one official with no brief for Phoenix insisted recently. Efforts to find contrary evidence were unsuccessful. Many of the accusations against Phoenix cannot be verified here. Some seem to be based on misunderstandings of Phoenix terminology and statistics.

200 Officials in Vietnam are critical of Phoenix on many other counts. In recent interviews with several officials involved in the program, a reporter heard these points:

provinces and most of the 242 districts of South Vietnam (all with U.S. advisers) are supposed to maintain dossiers on Vietcong officials in their area and a "blacklist" of wanted men and women.

Ideally, Special Branch Police (an intelligence unit of the National Police, advised and financed by the CIA), local troops and Provincial Reconnaissance Units are supposed to conduct operations to arrest these wanted persons. Arrested individuals are interrogated. When there is some evidence of a Vietcong connection, they are brought to trial before the provincial security team. High-level suspects are supposed to be bound over to a military field court.

Reality Differs From Model

260 As so often in Vietnam, reality bears small resemblance to this ideal model. Interviews with officials and observations in the countryside reveal deviations from the ideal.

The main problem is that Vietnamese don't seem interested in really prosecuting the program.

"They just aren't interested," said one official. "They don't want to be caught trying to get the VCI if they think maybe next year the VCI will be in control."

Some local officials have made private accommodations with the Vietcong, U.S. and Vietnamese officials are unwilling to upset these arrangements by chasing VCI.

Only in the last few

than the Vietnamese (figures) show 19,534 members of the so-called Vietcong "neutralized" during 1969—8,187 of them killed.

The rest were captured (8,515) or rallied to the government cause (4,832).

But several officials involved in the program, including some who are sharply critical of Phoenix, note a fact that is not tabulated in official statistics: A small fraction, probably one tenth to one fifth, of the VCI neutralized are captured or killed on purpose. The overwhelming majority are rounded up in military operations, killed in battles, ambushes or other military action, and described afterward as infrastructure. Only a handful are targeted, diligently pursued and captured or killed.

Phoenix Not Working

"The most important point about Phoenix," said one official who had access to all the program's statistics and records, "is that it isn't working."

That view is repeated by official and confidential U.S. establishments here, and it has been the conclusion of official and confidential studies, including recent reports by the CIA and the deputy under secretary of the Army, James V. Siena. Phoenix has failed to neutralize a significant number of important Vietcong officials.

"We are not bothering them now, that's for damn sure," one of the senior Americans in Vietnam said not long ago.

A common description of Phoenix one hears from officials in Vietnam is of a program without substance. A share of the killing and capturing that goes on in the war is attributed statistically to Phoenix, but—many officials say—most of Phoenix's share could easily be attributed to something or somebody else.

Phoenix's unsavory repu-

Phoenix is potentially dangerous, for it could be used against political opponents whether they were Vietcong or not. However, there is no evidence that this has happened yet.

Phoenix contributes substantially to corruption. Some local officials demand payoffs with threats of arrests under the Phoenix program, or release genuine Vietcong for cash.

Phoenix is helping the Vietcong more than hurting it. By throwing people in prison who are often only low-level operatives—sometimes people forced to cooperate with the Vietcong when they lived in VC territory—the government is alienating a large slice of the population. "We should not jail people," said Ho Ngoc Nhuan, chairman of the rural development committee of the Vietnamese House. "That makes them enemies of the government."

A Campaign is Necessary

All the officials interviewed were persuaded that a concerted campaign against the Vietcong organization is necessary if South Vietnam is to have any chance of independent survival in the long run, but all also agreed that the Phoenix program had failed to hurt the VC organization so far.

Phoenix was adopted by the Vietnamese government, at American urging (or perhaps insistence), in December 1967. It is supposed to unify the fragmented intelligence agencies in Vietnam, and share the best information among all operating units. Provincial security committees, part of the Phoenix structure, also have the power to try and sentence suspects to prison for up to two years.

There are 441 Americans attached to Phoenix, all as advisers. Americans play no direct role in Phoenix operations.

Phoenix offices in the 41

ernment put strong emphasis on Phoenix. Some officials think this new pressure may improve performance.

Largely because of Vietnamese disinterest, the local Phoenix offices simply do not work. Many keep no records. Others mount no operations. Phoenix is often run by poor-quality personnel, chosen for their jobs by local officials who don't want to waste their good people on the program. Most district officers are run by junior army officers who have little sense of the sophisticated political problems of hunting down Vietcong officials.

Neutralization Quotas

Perhaps to prod recalcitrant local officials, the central government assigns Phoenix quotas to the provinces. Thus a province chief has to report neutralization of a certain number of VCI every month to stay in good. "They will meet every quota that's established for them," one American adviser noted.

But meeting the quotas often means disregarding any standards. Officials often count every man arrested, even if he is released immediately for lack of evidence. American advisers refuse to confirm many of these alleged neutralizations, accounting for much of the difference of almost 100 percent between U.S. and South Vietnamese Phoenix statistics.

Quota-conscious district and province chiefs also pad their Phoenix figures with any number of citizens captured or killed in military operations, whether genuine VCI or not.

"Vietnamization" of Phoenix has, in a sense, already been completed—the only Americans involved are advisers. But some officials think most of the advisers should now be withdrawn.

"We've done all we can," one official said. "If they want to get the VCI, they can do it. We can't do anything more."

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- 143 - "PRU are now under local Vietnamese control, and have lost much of their ferocious reputation. 'They've lost 50 percent of their effectiveness.'" Comment: PRU statistics in the Phung Hoang program are significantly less than a year ago for several reasons: (1) There are not as many VCI to be found as formerly; many have rallied, been captured or killed, or have fled to Cambodia as the government extended its writ into the countryside. (2) Because of the success of pacification and military operations, there are now many more Phung Hoang forces, including police, in the field. Furthermore, the added effectiveness contributed by American advisors has been minor. The PRU have always operated with the approval of the Province or District chief, and primarily on their own. Local apathy does occur on occasion, and for varied reasons.
- 170 - "Phoenix is potentially dangerous, for it could be used against political opponents of the regime whether they were Viet Cong or not." Comment: This is a danger that is present in all South Vietnamese programs, but as Kaiser states, "there is no evidence that this has happened yet" in the Phung Hoang program. The police are the accepted means for dealing with civilians who are outside the law. All operations are approved in

advance and are subject to review. The participation of numerous GVN agencies actually inhibits misuse of the program and the presence of US advisors provides an added safeguard.

- 178 - "Phoenix contributes substantially to corruption." Comment: There is no evidence that Phung Hoang contributes to corruption any more than any police program. Corruption is deeply imbedded in the South Vietnamese social system, and some abuses undoubtedly exist in this program. But Phung Hoang did not create the opportunity for corruption, since the attack on the VCI has been going on since 1954, and with it, presumably, some corruption.
- 185 - "Phoenix is helping the Viet Cong more than hurting it. By throwing people in prison who are often only low-level operatives--the government is alienating a large slice of the population." Comment: There is no doubt that some alienation takes place when a member of the family is arrested. However, leniency and the opportunities for reconciliation which are provided in the Phung Hoang program minimize this. We believe far more are alienated by the terrorism, intimidation, kidnapping, forced labor, and high taxes imposed by the Viet Cong. These low-level operatives must be jailed to prove to them and others who would be similarly persuaded that if they support an illegal insurgency they will be punished.
- 202 - "All officials interviewed agreed that the Phoenix program had failed to hurt the VC so far." Comment: Knowledgeable officials recognize that there are problem areas and that the program has not destroyed the infrastructure. However, the intelligence community believes the program has seriously disrupted the enemy's apparatus, lowered its quality and effectiveness, and made a significant contribution to the allied war effort.
- 213 - "Phoenix was adopted by the GVN at American urging in December 1967." Comment: Although the Phoenix program had its beginning in 1967, it was not until the Presidential Decree of July 1968 that the program was officially sanctioned by the GVN and a countrywide effort (Phung Hoang) was authorized to collect information on the VCI and to plan and launch operations targetted specifically against it.
- 230 - "Americans play no direct role in Phoenix operations." Comment: American military forces sometimes participate in Phung Hoang-initiated activities. When American troops are used to cordon and seal villages containing VCI, they are being used in Phung Hoang operations.

- 242 - "Special Branch Police are financed by CIA and Provincial Reconnaissance Units are supposed to conduct operations to arrest these wanted persons." Comment: The Special Police are not paid by the CIA. Certain intelligence-producing operations are supported. The primary force used to arrest members of the VCI is the National Police Field Force, not the PRU. The regular, regional and popular forces, as well as the PRU, also conduct anti-VC operations.
- 250 - "Arrested individuals are interrogated. When there is some evidence of a Viet Cong connection, they are brought to trial." Comment: The implication here is that masses of people are arrested, all are interrogated and those on whom some evidence is developed are tried. The fact is that an arrest is made only when there is some evidence of collaboration with the enemy.
- 267 - "The main problem is that the Vietnamese don't seem interested in really prosecuting the program." Comment: Although there are still instances of obstructionism and lack of cooperation by local officials, there has been an overall and continuing improvement in the program's effectiveness. The increasing neutralizations of the last six months of 1969 attest to the program's growing effectiveness, and pressure from above has forced increasing cooperation among the various GVN security agencies.
- 273 - "They don't want to be caught trying to get the VCI if they think maybe next year the VCI will be in control." Comment: The impact of the negotiations and the US withdrawal program probably have caused some local officials to "sit on their hands." However, this attitude is the exception and not the rule. The number of South Vietnamese casualties each week attests to the willingness of the broad majority to bear arms for the government. The willingness of over three million civilians to commit themselves to the government under the People's Self-Defense Force program further attests to this.
- 278 - "Some local officials have made private accommodations with the Viet Cong." Comment: This is true, but again is the exception rather than the rule. Very few are willing to endanger their jobs and careers by restricting their anti-Viet Cong activities. The government has become less tolerant of ineffective officials, as attested by the large numbers of province and district chiefs replaced in the past year. The establishment of goals has also made it difficult for the local official to display apathy toward the Viet Cong.

- 285 - "Only in the last few months has the central government put strong emphasis on Phoenix. " Comment: President Thieu has given the program a high priority since the Presidential Decree of July 1968. Prime Minister Khiem, in his capacity as Interior Minister, has taken a personal interest in the program since its official inception. The current Director General of National Police is reportedly being relieved because he has not pushed Phoenix as hard as the Prime Minister would like.
- 293 - "Phoenix offices simply do not work. Many keep no records. Others mount no operations. " Comment: Again, these are exceptions. The success of the Phung Hoang program is generally consistent throughout the country with the minor exception of some Montagnard districts where there are few VCI. Reporting requirements are very strict and all districts have recorded operations.
- 296 - "Phoenix is often run by poor-quality personnel, chosen for their jobs by local officials who don't want to waste their good people on the program. " Comment: The program has suffered to some extent from the limited professional capability and lack of training and experience. The bulk of the best South Vietnamese are in ARVN main-line units and are not available. The requirements of the police have long been subordinated to the Army. Nevertheless, Saigon has put pressure on the province officials to assign the best available people to the program. The progress made in the program since July 1968 has been impressive and encouraging, and attests to the improving personnel situation.
- 302 - "Most district offices are run by junior army officers. " Comment: The District Chief is responsible for the Phung Hoang program and his table of organization rank is Major. Although many are Captains, they are all ARVN veterans and are also veterans of a lifetime of war in which the delicate balance of pro-and anti-Viet Cong sentiments is a matter of daily concern. Reacting to spot information that the local Viet Cong tax collector is stopping traffic three miles up the road does not represent a "sophisticated political problem. " It is a basic police criminal apprehension problem which requires tactical know-how.
- 322 - "Officials often count every man arrested, even if he is released immediately for lack of evidence. " Comment: Phung Hoang statistics are based on the name or position of the individual neutralized. There is a detailed procedure for confirming each case which is specifically designed to prevent padding.

147 - "We've done all we can," one (American) official said. "If they want to get the VCI, they can do it. We can't do anything more."
Comment: Police investigative work is highly skilled and inconsistent with the military approach which has dominated U.S. training efforts to date. The South Vietnamese need help on such things as investigative techniques and records management. American advisory personnel can assist in overcoming some of the weaknesses in the fields of identification, classification, judicial processing, detention, and prisoner accountability.

CONCLUSION:

The Vietnamese war is a joint military/civil conflict in which Viet Cong civilians, operating covertly, force other Vietnamese, through terrorism and intimidation, to cooperate. The Phung Hoang program is an effort through legal means to stop this covert civilian subversion. The Kaiser article makes wide use of terms which are repugnant to Americans and attempts to make points by the use of half-quotations taken out of context. It fails to take account of the unique setting within which the war is being fought -- namely, an insurgency in which the enemy is able to switch back and forth from military to political tactics at will.

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A10 Tuesday, Feb. 17, 1970 THE WASHINGTON POST

U.S. Aides in Vietnam Scorn Phoenix Project

By Robert G. Kaiser Jr.

Washington Post Foreign Service

1 SAIGON, Feb. 16—The program to neutralize the Vietcong infrastructure in South Vietnam is called Phoenix, and it is a bird of several feathers.

10 Some war critics in the United States have attacked Phoenix as an instrument of mass political murder. Such sinister descriptions are not heard in Vietnam, where Phoenix has the reputation of a poorly plotted farce, sometimes with tragic overtones.

20 The contradiction between Phoenix's lurid reputation as a sort of Vietnamese Murder, Inc., and the scorn with which it is widely regarded here typifies one of the most popular grievances of American officials in Vietnam: "They don't understand at home what's going on out here."

30 The gulf between home-front and battlefield is likely to appear Tuesday in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee hearing room, when American pacification officials are expected to be questioned closely about the Phoenix program.

40 Because Phoenix is an offspring of the CIA and because its operations have always been obscured by the cloak of official secrecy, the Foreign Relations Committee may discuss the program in a closed session. But Phoenix's secrets are not well kept in Vietnam.

50 The South Vietnamese-run program does involve killing. American statistics on Phoenix results (which are

tation apparently stems from its clandestine nature, its connections with some deliberate assassinations, and accusations made by several public figures and army veterans about its activities.

An idea of the CIA

Phoenix was the idea of the CIA, and until last July it was run by the agency.

130 Phoenix operations conducted by Provincial Reconnaissance Units have involved assassinations. These units, another CIA organization composed of Vietnamese troops and U.S. advisers, were organized primarily as a counter-terror group to operate behind enemy lines. Assassination of Vietcong officials was one of their assignments.

But the units are now under local Vietnamese control, and have lost much of their ferocious reputation. "They've lost 50 per cent of their effectiveness," according to one U.S. official.

150 "There's some killing, but this is a war. There are no organized bump-off squads," one official with no brief for Phoenix insisted recently. Efforts to find contrary evidence were unsuccessful. Many of the accusations against Phoenix cannot be verified here. Some seem to be based on misunderstandings of Phoenix terminology and statistics.

Officials in Vietnam are critical of Phoenix on many other counts. In recent interviews with several officials involved in the program, a reporter heard these

provinces and most of the 242 districts of South Vietnam (all with U.S. advisers) are supposed to maintain dossiers on Vietcong officials in their area and a "blacklist" of wanted men and women.

Ideally, Special Branch Police (an intelligence unit of the National Police, advised and financed by the CIA), local troops and Provincial Reconnaissance Units are supposed to conduct operations to arrest these wanted persons. Arrested individuals are interrogated. When there is some evidence of a Vietcong connection, they are brought to trial before the provincial security team. High-level suspects are supposed to be bound over to a military field court.

Reality Differs From Model

260 As so often in Vietnam, reality bears small resemblance to this ideal model. Interviews with officials and observations in the countryside reveal deviations from the ideal.

The main problem is that Vietnamese don't seem interested in really prosecuting the program.

"They just aren't interested," said one official. "They don't want to be caught trying to get the VCI if they think maybe next year the VCI will be in control."

Some local officials have made private accommodations with the Vietcong, U.S. and Vietnamese officials say. They are unwilling to upset these arrangements by chasing VCI.

Only in the last few

than the Vietnamese figures) show 19,534 members of the so-called Vietcong infrastructure (VCI) "neutralized" during 1959—6,187 of them killed.

The rest were captured (8,315) or rallied to the government cause (4,332).

But several officials involved in the program, including some who are sharply critical of Phoenix, note a fact that is not tabulated in official statistics: A small fraction, probably one tenth to one fifth, of the VCI neutralized are captured or killed on purpose. The overwhelming majority are rounded up in military operations, killed in battles, ambushes or other military action, and described afterward as infrastructure. Only a handful are targeted, diligently pursued and captured or killed.

Phoenix Not Working

"The most important point about Phoenix," said one official who had access to all the program's statistics and records, "is that it isn't working."

That view is repeated by official and confidential U.S. establishments here, and it has been the conclusion of official and confidential studies, including recent reports by the CIA and the deputy under secretary of the Army, James V. Siena. Phoenix has failed to neutralize a significant number of important Vietcong officials.

"We are not bothering them now, that's for damn sure," one of the senior Americans in Vietnam said not long ago.

A common description of Phoenix one hears from officials in Vietnam is of a program without substance. A share of the killing and capturing that goes on in the war is attributed statistically to Phoenix, but—many officials say—most of Phoenix's share could easily be attributed to something or somebody else.

Phoenix's unsavory repu-

Phoenix is potentially dangerous, for it could be used against political opponents of the regime, whether they were Vietcong or not. However, there is no evidence that this has happened yet.

Phoenix contributes substantially to corruption. Some local officials demand payoffs with threats of arrests under the Phoenix program, or release genuine Vietcong for cash.

Phoenix is helping the Vietcong more than hurting it. By throwing people in prison who are often only low-level operatives—sometimes people forced to cooperate with the Vietcong when they lived in VC territory—the government is alienating a large slice of the population. "We should not jail people," said Ho Ngoc Nhuan, chairman of the rural development committee of the Vietnamese House. "That makes them enemies of the government."

A Campaign Is Necessary

All the officials interviewed were persuaded that a concerted campaign against the Vietcong organization is necessary if South Vietnam is to have any chance of independent survival in the long run, but all also agreed that the Phoenix program had failed to hurt the VC organization so far.

Phoenix was adopted by the Vietnamese government, at American urging (or perhaps insistence), in December 1957. It is supposed to unify the fragmented intelligence agencies in Vietnam, and share the best information among all operating units. Provincial security committees, part of the Phoenix structure, also have the power to try and sentence suspects to prison for up to two years.

There are 411 Americans attached to Phoenix, all as advisers. Americans play no direct role in Phoenix operations.

Phoenix offices in the 41

months has the central government put strong emphasis on Phoenix. Some officials think this new pressure may improve performance.

Largely because of Vietnamese disinterest, the local Phoenix offices simply do not work. Many keep no records. Others mount no operations. Phoenix is often run by poor-quality personnel, chosen for their jobs by local officials who don't want to waste their good people on the program. Most district officers are run by junior army officers who have little sense of the sophisticated political problems of hunting down Vietcong officials.

Neutralization Quotas

Perhaps to prod recalcitrant local officials, the central government assigns Phoenix quotas to the provinces. Thus a province chief has to report neutralization of a certain number of VCI every month to stay in good. "They will meet every quota that's established for them," one American adviser noted.

But meeting the quotas often means disregarding any standards. Officials often count every man arrested, even if he is released immediately for lack of evidence. American advisers refuse to confirm many of these alleged neutralizations, accounting for much of the difference of almost 100 per cent between U.S. and South Vietnamese Phoenix statistics.

Quota-conscious district and province chiefs also pad their Phoenix figures with any number of citizens captured or killed in military operations, whether genuine VCI or not.

"Vietnamization" of Phoenix has, in a sense, already been completed—the only Americans involved are advisers. But some officials think most of the advisers should now be withdrawn.

"We've done all we can," one official said. "If they want to get the VCI, they can do it. We can't do anything more."